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FREEDOM AND THE FAMILY FARM...

By Wheeler McMillen, Vice President, Farm Journal
^{3a} before the
National 4-H Club Camp Silver Anniversary Dinner,
Carvel Hall, Annapolis, June 18, 1955

The invitation to talk with you on this significant 4-H occasion is an honor which I gratefully appreciate. Because I am permitted to talk for a few minutes about the singular civic and agricultural inheritance which is ours, and yours, it is a special privilege.

For the second half of the twentieth century these United States of America will belong to you and to your generation. As you attain maturity you acquire the responsibility of citizenship in this republic of free people.

You and I and some 165 million other people--all of us together hardly one-sixteenth of living humankind--are extremely fortunate to share in this American heritage. We know that. Because we are so fortunate I am sure you will agree that the more clearly we understand the great story of America the more wholeheartedly we can enjoy our great country. The more purposefully we can dedicate our Heads and our Hearts, our Hands and our Health to preserve, for those who will follow us, this heritage undiminished and unimpaired.

It was nearly three and a half centuries ago--348 years ago on the 13th of May to be exact--that a little band of 105 men landed in the wilderness not 200 miles southward from here, at Jamestown. They came not as farmers, but as adventurers seeking

gold and precious metals and profitable trade. Coming with small forethought for their food supply, more than half of the first group died from hunger and disease, and many of the later groups faced times of starvation.

They made another serious mistake. They tried to be communists. Whatever any man gained or produced was put into a common store to be equally divided. Naturally few saw why they should work hard but they all went hungry. Then a wise leader, Sir Thomas Dale, set apart three acres for each man to cultivate and to use for himself. Later real farms were granted to the settlers. A dozen years after 1607 women came to the colony and then, we may reasonably say, the family farm began its American history.

No gold and no precious stones were found in Virginia. The settlers found richer treasures, corn and tobacco, instead. With the corn they could feed themselves. The tobacco they could sell. With the planting of these crops the conquest of the new continent got under way.

A few hundred miles to the north another group of settlers--102 men, women and children--stepped ashore from the Mayflower in 1620, and more soon followed. They, too, tried communism. Each was ordered to contribute equal work and promised equal shares. They also had their hungry times in consequence. After each family was assigned its own area to cultivate the people began to have enough. And thanks to the Indian Squanto, and his own

private Point Four program, the settlers acquired the know-how with which to produce the great American corn crop.

From these tiny beginnings our heritage began to build up. More people came. Other colonies were founded along this eastern coast. In time there were a million people here, then two million, three and then nearly four million. Most of them thought they were better off than in the old countries from which they came. At least they could count on having enough to eat. But life was hard and primitive. Comforts were scarce. Now and then some enterpriser became rich, but he was the fortunate exception. Most of the folks lived in huts and little houses. Their clothes were mostly what they could make for themselves with enormous labor. Roads were no more than wilderness trails. The exchange of goods was difficult. The tools with which men worked were hand tools. It took nearly every energy to provide food, clothing, and shelter. No great quantities of new wealth could be produced.

Our American grew during those colonial years, but of genuine progress there was not much to record. No noteworthy inventions appeared. The lot of the average family was hard. The opportunity for real improvement did not exist. The indispensable ingredient of our heritage had not yet appeared.

The people of the colonies were constantly regulated and the regulations were forever being changed. They were subject to the whims of kings and to the acts of a distant parliament. They were forbidden to manufacture iron. They were prohibited from trading wherever they might find foreign markets. Sometimes

prices were fixed upon what they sold and at others they were told how much they could plant or sell of certain crops. Under such restrictions and abuses they began to realize that they could not expect to prosper. But when they tried to resist or evade the unjust laws attempts were made to beat them down by military force.

By this time the courageous and intelligent men of the thirteen colonies became certain about that missing ingredient. They knew what was needed to release the energies of Americans, what was necessary to enable them to build here a prosperous and happy way of life such as men had not known before. And time has proved how right they were.

The adopted the Declaration of Independence and pledged to its support their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor. That meant no less than it said. If captured they would be shot or hanged; their fortunes would be confiscated; and if they "renegged" their honor certainly would be lost. The long, hard war of the Revolution was under way.

The struggle was not easy. Nor did everybody get behind it. John Adams said that about a third of the people were determined to win the Independence, about a third were against it, and another third didn't care much one way or the other.

The great decision came in 1781 at Yorktown, when Cornwallis surrendered his sword and his army. You may be interested to note something about that date. From the first settlement at Jamestown in 1607 until the victory at Yorktown in 1781, the

number of years had been 174. If you will now add to 1781, 174 more years, you come up with 1955! A century and three quarters in the colonial period, a century and three quarters as a free nation!

Before the new nation could get on its way something more had to be done. Five years after Yorktown George Washington and a few leaders met here in Annapolis. They voted to call a convention the next spring in Philadelphia to plan an improved national government. That convention, working with almost super-human wisdom, drew up our Constitution, the most successful effort men have ever made to enact the Golden Rule into workable law. With the Bill of Rights that soon was added, the Constitution assured Americans full protection from governmental interference with their rightful acts, full power to govern themselves, complete freedom to think and speak, to worship and work as each chose to do.

Individual freedom and the incentives of individual reward released the energies of Americans.

Only one ingredient of America had been changed. Here were still the same fields and forests and rivers. Here were still the same natural resources, no greater than for all the centuries of colonial and Indian occupation. The same sun shone on the land, the same rains and snows fell over it. Here were the same people as before.

The magic ingredient was individual freedom. Men threw back their shoulders with new dignity--they had become their own rulers, each equal with the other! A fresh spirit electrified the land. The mountains ceased to be barriers and men took their

families to the westward to build new homes and new farms. When difficulties arose courage and invention conquered them. Swift decades brought the cotton gin, the steamboat, the reaper, the steel plow, the telegraph and the sewing machine. Highways and railroads and ships were built to move people and things. Factories were erected to make goods. The standard of living began to rise as the farms and factories produced still more, and people could live better with less effort. The United States expanded as it acquired the Louisiana Purchase and Florida, Texas and California. And ever the pioneer farmers pushed on westward, to clear away the forest, to break up the ancient prairies, and to irrigate the deserts. They moved across the land, plowing up the continent, not like Soviet slaves ordered out from Moscow, but as free men and women going out to build better lives.

They wanted even better opportunities for their children so they built schools and colleges. They wanted to know more about the land and crops and livestock so they created experiment stations and established research. They wanted to bring the new knowledge direct to their farms so they welcomed the extension system. They wanted their youngsters to be better prepared than they had been and to live richer lives so they supported the 4-H clubs and vocational teaching. Year by year they freely adopted new machines and new methods.

So it is that on this June night of 1955 you and I can look southward across the waters and the tidelands towards Yorktown and say that not in a single one of all these 174 years have the American

people had to fear hunger or famine. No other great nation in all history can say as much. Free farmers have produced abundantly!

Can we take our good fortune merely for granted? Not if we recall that as we sit here comfortable and happy, more people on this earth tonight will go to bed hungry and ill-nourished than have been well fed today!

A century and a half ago, when nine Americans farmers did well to feed themselves and one other person, not many people dared take time to work at anything else except to raise food. But now, when one American farm worker not only feeds himself but eighteen other people, our nation can spare workers to man multitudes of factories and to perform multitudes of services and to make life in America a pleasant life.

Would it surprise you to know that more than half the people of this world will sleep tonight in one-room huts, most of them with dirt floors? And that more than half of the people on earth know that if they go any place tomorrow, even to carry goods to market, they must walk or depend upon a donkey? And that more people know that if they eat tomorrow it will be what food they raise or can find or barter for than there are who can go to any store? And that most of them know that if they fall seriously ill, no competent doctor of medical care will be within reach? And that of all the mothers in the world more than half of them know that if they have two children one will never live to grow up?

Why must these things be? Because individual freedom, the indispensable ingredient of American abundance, has not yet spread far enough! Subject for centuries to the tyrannies of despotic governments and equally despotic customs, half the world has not yet learned even how to feed itself.

The great problem of this old planet today is not military nor diplomatic, nor political nor economic. It is a food problem. Whether the statesmen meet at the summit or the armies clash in the valleys neither will solve it. But when wisdom enough comes that the less fortunate half of the world can be told to take their families to the land, and can be educated to produce, and can be free to enjoy the fruits of their own toil, then, perhaps, peace and happiness and goodwill toward men will more widely prevail. True freedom could change the Old World's Man with the Hoe into a man with hope.

Meanwhile we in blessed America may be thankful that our farm trouble is a difficulty of abundance and not a problem of hunger. We talk about it a lot but it doesn't really bother us much. Through research and education and the growth of our numbers it will be solved.

Across this broad land tonight our 165 million Americans will rest well-fed and in comfort. Their week's work has brought higher pay than in any other country, because they have produced more. They produce more than half of the world's manufactures, and do more than a third of all the world's business. Food does not worry them--they know that the stores will be well stocked again when Monday comes and

that restaurants will be open tomorrow. Our town and city neighbors can take the certainty of food for granted, and thank Heaven that they can!

Tonight the cattle are grazing and growing fat in a million American pastures. The calves and the pigs and lambs are growing fast into meat. The wheat is ripening on millions of acres, the corn is growing in a million fields, hurrying to be knee-high by the Fourth of July. In a little while the electric lights will be switched off in several million comfortable American farm homes. Fathers and mothers and boys and girls will go to sleep, knowing that tomorrow they will be free to worship as they choose, to speak without fear, and that the work they choose to do next week will reward them in some proportion to their effort.

So, in this last minute tonight, let us glance back again through the dim mists of seventeen decades. Let us think reverently for a moment of those soldiers of the Revolution who gave us independence. Let us think with gratitude of those wise Fathers of the Constitution who set up our structure of freedom. Let us be grateful that bold inventors and daring business leaders and millions of honest workers have so enriched our country. Let us think of the millions of pioneer families whose toil built the farms of America, and whose own devotion to freedom has kept these farms to this day to be family farms.

We can most easily describe the blessings of freedom in material terms, such as food and automobiles or bathtubs and television sets.

Yes, freedom has brought us wealth and well-being. May we never forget, however, that freedom makes us rich, too, in intangible values. No one can measure liberty of spirit and independence of mind; they are possessions of priceless worth.

America is great because Americans are free. I know that you, with all your pure Hearts, your capable Hands, your clear Heads and your hearty Health will do your best to keep it free and to make it greater.





